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ABSTRACT

This paper examines young peoples' ideas and their dreams of the future. It is part of a longitudinal study in which students at four schools in Australia were interviewed twice a year during their time in secondary school. The paper claims that this long-term engagement with individuals heightened specificity of the dreams, though it was difficult to interpret this specificity in interactions with more general processes. The study draws attention to the types of questions researchers ask and self-reflectively questions how the research affects the students in the study, and whether the young people were making reflexive judgments about themselves and about the researchers. The first section of the report considers three male students of non-English backgrounds and illustrates the problem with "data-base" type representations of ethnicity as a single construct of advantage or disadvantage, as well as some issues relating to how the study may affect the students in it. The second section explores girls' aspirations and discusses findings from the study. The article examines the different influences of ethnicity among the students and the ways in which cultural change, educational reform, and gendered psychology may be producing certain orientations to the future in early adolescent middle-class girls. Contains 21 references. (RJM)

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Dreams of the future in an era of change: longitudinal qualitative research speaks back to policy studies

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> *... people always ask you what you want to be when you grow up and I just have no idea... so I've kind of thought about it... cos they kind of put you on the spot and they can make you feel like you have to know what you're doing... so you kind of have to think about it.*
>
> *(12 year old girl, at the beginning of secondary school; WL.94b*

> *Clare: Sometimes I just meet some people, and it's just like, "what do you want to do in your life?" Like, "um, I don't know".*
> *Serena: But so many people say that now. I've said that to so many people, 'well I don't know", and they say, 'yeah, lots of people say that'.*
> *Alice: sometimes you just say it because you don't really want to go into it. Sometimes I feel it's like a personal thing. You are sort of working out what you want to do, and you just sort of, you're not definite, you don't know what's going to happen...*
>
> *(13 year old girls, WA.95a, p.9)*

> *You just sort of have dreams, but some of them you know probably won't come true.*
>
> *(13 year old, WK.95a, p.8)*

The final decades of the twentieth century have been an era of large-scale economic and cultural change. In Australia at least, a core concern of a large range of education reforms has been to reshape young people's ideas and ambitions about the future: to prepare them better for the range of jobs that will exist in the future; to reshape their ideas of their role as a man or as a woman. But how do shifts in economic context or in education policy actually engage with the fantasies, intentions, dreams and development over time of young people? And how do educational researchers communicate with students about these matters - and with what effect?

My opening quotes, and the remainder of this paper, are taken from work in progress on a qualitative, longitudinal study of young people at four schools in Australia. In it, Julie McLeod and I are interviewing the same students twice a year through the course of their

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secondary school.[1] The quoted comments of the girls illustrate some of the issues we confront in such a project: how we as researchers are affecting the students we are studying; that the young people are themselves making reflexive judgements both about us and about their own thinking; the problem of what to make of any comment, what meaning it has, and what weight to give it (how much of what they say is simply an artefact of 'being put on the spot'?).

In this paper I want to consider some of these issues in relation to what the students in our study are saying about their ideas and dreams of their own futures. And I also want to consider an additional issue which I am facing increasingly as I attempt to write papers about the project and submit them to journals. How do I address 'inequalities' and social differences, how do I talk about patterns, about group differences as compared with individual stories? What type of evidence is appropriate? Why did a recent reviewer object to the use of terms such as 'many' or 'mostly' to talk about some aspects of our evidence? And why do I nevertheless *want* to make claims of this kind rather than just present 'rich descriptions' of detailed case studies?

Research traditions and the design of the 12 to 18 Project

Julie and I embarked on the 12 to 18 Project with a number of interests stemming from our previous work: a concern to take further and update discussions about patterns and processes of educational inequality; an interest in the discursive forms and effects of gender reform projects; and an interest in somehow taking an interest in both sociological and psychological perspectives on young people and gender: seeing them not just as cardboard mouthpieces of cultural discourse, but as complex subjects (located in cultural discourse). Key features of the project we designed were these: an ongoing attention to students in four different schools, which would offer opportunities for comparison and contrast; that the interviewing would be flexible and that we would do all the interviewing ourselves; that the scope of the interviews would relate to conceptions of self; to discussions about school; and to questions about the future.

In assessing the effects of changes over time, policy-makers commonly rely on large-scale 'data': the 'facts and figures' of who is now achieving what, entering what courses, doing what jobs; and survey-based data on what young people now think. Policy-makers tend to take at face value the answers given to questions such as 'what do you want to be when you leave school?' They construct students as an 'other' whose answers and psychology are transparent. In a previous project, with Gilah Leder, I reviewed major Australian data-bases on 'student pathways', their categories and modes of collection of data, and their shortcomings (*Yates and Leder, 1996)*. The Australian Youth Study for example is a longitudinal, time-series data-set that surveys cohorts of young people about similar things, and is able to show some broad changes over time; but it is constantly faced with the problem of what particular 'data' means: whether the questions have the same meaning at different times; how the answers relate to the broader thinking and decisions the young people make.

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[1] The *12 to 18 Project* began in 1993, and is being funded by a Large Grant from the Australia Research Council (after earlier pilot funding from La Trobe University, and from an ARC Small Grant). It is a project developed jointly by the two principal researchers, Lyn Yates (La Trobe University) and Julie McLeod (Deakin University), and has benefited by research assistance from Geraldine Ditchburn, Karen Halasa, Kathleen Orr, Malcolm Turnbull, Terri Yates, Sera Arnold and Christine Brew. Two papers which discuss the shape and methodology of the project in more detail are *Yates & McLeod, 1996; McLeod & Yates, 1997.*

Even in terms of tracking changes in what young people are doing, rather than what they are thinking, data-bases are not as transparent as is often assumed. Girls are now a majority of undergraduates compared with a minority twenty years ago; but the range of courses included as 'university studies' has changed (it now includes nursing and primary teaching), and different entry patterns to jobs mean that undergraduate university study is now a less elite achievement than it was then. Similarly, categories such as 'living independently' cover a range of different material and emotional arrangements, especially in relation to gender and ethnicity.*(Hartley, 1996)*

Another type of policy-related study are ethnographies and poststructural studies of policy reception (*Ball, 1994; Kenway & Willis 1993; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie, 1997)*. These studies address with more complexity the meanings students are making of particular changes; the 'discourses' at work in particular settings; disjunctions and contradictions in the discourses; patterns of response in given contexts at particular points in time. Such studies by their nature can give on a limited attention to how individuals develop their identity and values over time, to the group of questions about which Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen and Monica Rudberg have written so well, 'How are we to study individuals in change, and not only the change of discourses?' (*Nielsen & Rudberg, 1994:1, see also Nielsen,)*

The project on which the present paper is based is related to, but different from the types of study I have outlined above. Like the ethnographic and poststructural work, it is interested in meanings as complex and situational; and like the data-base work it is concerned with some questions about effects and outcomes, what is happening and what is being produced today. In other words, its overall focus is on biography in interaction with schooling (or schooling in interaction with biography).

Methodologically we are concerned with trying to negotiate two key problems which have been given heightened prominence in research debates of the past decade. One is the issue of the ethics and effects of the researchers' interactions with those they study (*discussed further in McLeod and Yates, 1997)*. The other is the problem of analytic stance: a problem that traditional (and indeed any) categories of analysis and interpretation (of gender, for example; or class) create a dominant story that marginalizes some experiences; but, on the other hand, that without some analytic tools that point to some commonalities in processes, we can be left with an approach that is simply self-indulgent.

> *the grand postfeminist "Law of difference" should not be allowed to block "small theories of similarity" [...] if there is nothing but particular and diversified experience, collective social criticism (and action) becomes almost impossible*
>
> *(Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994, p.4, quoting Susan Bordo's (1990) work. A similar case is made in the article by Martin, 1994)*

Or again, in a somewhat different line of argument, introducing a recent collection of writing on 'struggles for difference and equality in education', both Chandra Mohanty in her preface, and the editors, Leslie Roman and Linda Eyre refer to the 'paradoxes' of working with liberal categories, of the 'inadvertant continuity of so-called liberal, progressive or even leftist agendas and practices in education with conservative agendas' (px) but also that '[W]e are left

with no doubt whatsoever that struggles over difference and equality in education *matter* (px, Roman & Eyre, 1997).

Research traditions and evidence:
In this project then, the longitudinal engagement with individuals opens up specificity; but interpretation and presentation (story-telling, analysis) about the project involves a struggle about how to speak of specificity in interaction with more general process. The issue that I think I am struggling with is that the project falls between two methodological types of work: work which is focussed on telling the story of, and bringing into view, the experiences of a previously marginalized group, and using that focus to question dominant narratives about gender or inequality etc; and work which is designed to test or demonstrate patterns of 'who gets what' in the course of schooling. The relative looseness of the form of engagement with the students (the fact that we are not simply focussing on moral reasoning, or identity questions, but a range of different questions about self, schooling and future), the reflexive questioning, and the persistence over time is influenced by poststructural and ethnographic work; while the interest in an ongoing comparative method: drawing comparisons between schools or between girls and boys in the same school or between the same student at different ages, is a more traditional form of research design. As a result, the study lacks the purity in analytic style of either form of research. But I want to argue that for the context in which I am working it is relevant both to raise sceptical and multiple questions about the constructing nature of the interview; but also to attempt comparative snapshots of points of difference in what is being said by different groups of students.

One issue I want to draw attention to here is a disparity in the types of questions reviewers put to different types of research projects. So-called ethnographies, close-up studies of a particular group of students, are not asked to account for their processes of selecting particular quotes or telling particular stories; it is understood that the research of this type necessarily involves prolonged engagement by the researcher, and a range of reflective interpretations and evidence-gathering. And yet, as Ian Watson has argued (*Watson, 1993, also Yates, 1997b)*, ethnographies often insufficiently theorize their initial selection of the group to be studied, and inappropriately make claims about its generality (for example as an explanation of 'working class male resisters', or 'working class women'). Our project was set up to disrupt too easy a conflation of class or gender or ethnicity with a single (group) set of experiences: we are looking at students of similar backgrounds but in different school contexts, and we have a form of study where we know them in some detail over an extended time. But if we attempt to talk about any patterns in this study, this is frequently perceived simply as an unrigorous and small-scale attempt at quantification, rather than a way of illustrating something in the context of a much larger pattern of engagement, comparison, reflection and micro-interpretation.

In the remainder of the paper, I will take up two aspects of our study which relate to what the young people were saying about the future, and in which I hope to illustrate further what this study is trying to do relative to the forms of research I've mentioned earlier. The first section considers three male students of non-English background and illustrates the problem with 'data-base' type representations of ethnicity as a single construct of advantage or disadvantage; as well as some issues relating to how our study may affect the students in it. The second section takes up the issue of some interest to reformers: what are girls' aspirations today, and discusses some findings from our study, as well as the issue of on what bases

interpretations are made here, and the problem of what representation of evidence is appropriate.

I What sort of 'factor' is 'ethnicity'?

In the data-bases policy-makers are fond of, one of the most common 'social indicators' included is ethnicity, usually measured by one or more of the following: country of origin of parents; language spoken at home; years since arrival in Australia. (see Yates and Leder, 1996) Georgina Tsolidis has written about the misleading picture of groups that is built up on this basis:

> *one of the groups I am interviewing in schools at present, are English-speaking, British-born immigrants. It is not until you see these students in the classroom that you realise that many are ethnically Indian. It is not until you separate the girls from the boys and talk with them that you realise that Indian girls born in England have very different experiences and desires to Indian boys born in England.*
>
> (Tsolidis, in Yates and Leder, 1996:226)

Also obscured, Tsolidis notes, is an appreciation of effects of particular migration experiences (for example that some families have migrated two or three times), or the strength of particular cultural identifications.

In the light of these criticisms, we might consider what type of story and what type of analysis is being produced in the 12 to 18 Project. In terms of who is included in the study, the selection of those we study, our starting point is quite crude. We began by selecting schools, schools whose composition reflected different locations and different wealth, and where there would be opportunities for contrast but also comparison (that is that students from similar social backgrounds might be present at more than one school in our study).[2] From there we simply interviewed all students in a class, then selected 6 to 8 students for the ongoing study based on having similar numbers of girls and boys, trying to get a range of 'personality' types (that is, not just choosing all students who were talkative, or attractive, or obvious 'characters' who would make good copy), and, if possible, trying to get some diversity of ethnic background. We did not specifically ask about this background in the first interviews, so we did this on the basis of appearance and name. This is, to say the least, not a sophisticated technique, but it nevertheless produced a rather different means of studying 'ethnicity' than most ethnographic or sub-culture studies. Our starting point meant that instead of pre-designating the features of the group to be studied, we would be looking at this more inductively: in what ways was ethnicity raised across the various students in our study and the different types of questions. Following the initial selection of students we felt slightly embarrassed that it seemed we had a study which would under-represent ethnicity as an issue, as our core students seemed, with a few exceptions, to be a very 'anglo' bunch.[3] It was only in

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[2] This is discussed at more length in a recent conference paper, Yates, 1997.

[3] One side issue here was that we had chosen the private school in our study because it was a large school and known to have an ethnically diverse population, in particular a large number of Jewish students. We chose one of these students to include in our longitudinal study, but they and their parents declined to participate. In subsequent approaches at this school, we found that the richest students and most powerful families did not agree to participate; just as, at one of the other starting point schools, the most inarticulate students from the

year 9 (1996) that we had our first solo interviews with students, and asked them specifically to tell us a bit about their families. At this point we found that many more students than we realized had one parent born overseas, ongoing contact with family overseas, and so on. This then raises issues about what interpretive moves we had made in relation to earlier interviews, whether or in what ways we would re-think the earlier experiences in the light of the new discussion and information, and so on.

I now want to very briefly tell the stories of three 'ethnic' boys in our study in relation to the focus of this paper on 'dreams of the future'.

Yanni

The first student, Yanni, right from year 7 would talk vividly and at length, about what he wanted to do in the future. In year 7, he dreamt about being a scientist or astronaut; he said that his mother wanted him to be a doctor, but the thought of cutting people made him dizzy. He is working hard at school and determined to succeed - in fact at recesses he goes off by himself and tries to keep scientific facts (such as the distances to the various planets) in his brain. In year 8, he tells us he is not so much daydreaming about the future, but having nightmares: a nightmare of being suspended between life and death, of having to hold on to two strings with tigers underneath, and if he lets go, he will fall to the ground. In year 9, he says he wants to be a surgeon. In year 10, he says he wants to do medicine, to try to become a doctor, but it will be very hard to do. He says he will work his head off to try, and if he does not get the marks the first time, he thinks he will repeat VCE. This student constantly talks about his mother and about trying to do what she wants, and he constantly raises the issue of the contrast between his schooling in Sri Lanka (which he left when he was 10) and the schooling in Melbourne. He finds very difficult the fact that he is at a school where peer culture ridicules good behaviour and application to work; and he is ridiculed and isolated by the other students, and very lonely. He is a Buddhist, and says he takes seriously the injunction not to hurt anything. He likes being interviewed by us by himself, and uses the opportunity to talk for a very long time.

Endo

Endo attends the same school as Yanni, but is not isolated and lonely. In year 7 his dreams are to be a basketball player or a comedian. When asked what he might be doing at 25 he talks about going to parties with girls and driving a car. The next year, his dream is still to play basketball. When we ask if teachers or parents ask much about the future, he says his parents do. In year 9, he engages in the interview in the most minimal form, saying little, but again mentioning being a basketball player. In year 10 he says he wants to be a mechanic, a motor designer. He says he thinks about the future a lot: if he will have a good looking wife; if he will have a good job; if he will get paid good money. 'Not to be rich like a king or anything, but just to get fairly good pay.' In his first solo interview with us (end of year 9), we also find out that he attends Turkish school on Saturday mornings and has done so since he started primary school; he was born in Australia; his parents were born in Greece; his father had come to Australia when he was 17, then gone back to Greece to find a wife and marry his mother. Endo speaks Turkish at home with his parents; has a lot of Turkish friends, though at school only one or two of his friends are Turkish. In the context of a series of questions we ask about views on various issues (unemployment, religion, race), Endo says that he is

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poorest backgrounds (the sisters whose interview is quoted in *Yates & McLeod, 1996*, also declined to be part of the ongoing study.

religious (a Muslim) and takes seriously prohibitions on alcohol and drugs. (The school that he attends has a reputation for drug and alcohol use being common, and many students in the study confirm this.)

Mee

Mee attends a private school. In the first round of interviews, where his fellow interviewees (and most other students at this school) are taking for granted that they will go to university in the future, he says he is not sure whether he will get there. He mentions concern about whether his marks will be good enough; that he does not want to be a lawyer like his father, whom he sees as a bit of a prig; but that he hopes he will get to university. In year 8, he and his friends say they don't think about the future much (in an interview where they are all clearly wanting it to finish as soon as possible). In 1996, he talks about the future in terms of his hopes for the rock band he is in. In his solo interview he is extremely critical of the school and its insistence on conformity, and the emphasis it places on uniform and hair, etc. And he is critical of teachers whom he sees as patronizing him. At the end of this year, with the assistance and encouragement of his parents, Mee moves to a different private school, an alternative one (no uniform, non-traditional curriculum processes, etc). When we interview him again, he has just come back from a world trip (funded by his grandfather, a successful businessman). He talks about the future in terms of wanting to be a great leader and really make a difference in the world, but feeling equally that nothing really exciting is going to happen in his life. While Mee was at the first school, he was critical of many things, referring often to its hypocrisy. He talked about the problems of living in a suburb distant from the school and not one where other students of the school lived[4], but he did not raise the issue of ethnicity, though he was one of the very few students at this school of Asian appearance (and, though 'Mee' is a pseudonym, his own first name was a distinctly Chinese one). When we asked about his parents in the solo interview there at the end of year 9, he told us that his father (a lawyer) is Anglo, but his mother (a teacher) was born in China and speaks Cantonese at home. He said he sees that she is trying to give him the best of both worlds, but that he has no wish to speak Cantonese. Later he says of his Chinese family 'they sort of accept me, but like you always have the feeling because you're half Chinese, half Australian, you're not sort of ever going to fit into either of the cultures' (WMin.96b, p.12). The following year, at the new school, we begin by asking him about the school, and what differences he finds compared with his old school. He talks about the fact that it feels like a community, that people are 'just accepted for their differences', that there is not any noticeable bullying. In this interview he raises the issue of ethnicity and his family a number of times, and largely in positive terms: that his Chinese grandmother wants him, as the first-born male, to do well at school; and how his family has been keen to give him and his sister a good education.

Even in this summarized form we can get some sense of the complexity of issues in relation to students, schooling, and orientation to the future. On a data-base, the experiences, the achievements and the hopes of Yanni and Endo and Mee might simply cancel each other out. The qualitative, longitudinal study, while in no sense capturing the 'truth' or total story about any of these students, nevertheless I think can produce helpful accounts for *education* purposes. For example, that 'ethnicity' is not a singular issue, nor a simple form of advantage or disadvantage to them, but that it is one significant feature in the ways they engage with

[4] It was an affluent suburb, but not in the same social stratum as the very elite suburbs in which the school was located. Many students in Mee's suburb also attended private school, but most attended one located in that suburb.

school and the broader culture. In both Yanni's and Mee's stories, we can see the significance of interactive effects between particular schools and particular characteristics of the students' culture - that their sense of themselves and their possibilities could be different if they were at a different school. We also see the effects of parent know-how on their experiences. Yanni's school, probably by default (lack of know-how by his parents) was producing the maximum disjunction with his past and his values[5]; Mee's parents initially send him to a school he later describes as 'one of the so-called best ranking private schools in Melbourne', but find a more congenial one for him when he is unhappy there[6].

But our experiences in 'gathering the data' here are also an issue[7]. For Yanni, who seems to be intensely unhappy in his life caught between his difficulties at school and the high hopes of his mother whom he wants to protect from worry about him, the interviews seem to provide a welcome space to talk about himself. But should we be attempting to intervene rather than just listen? Should we see whether the school is being clear enough in what it needs for him to succeed? [8] But if we did that, we change directly our relationship to him (and the other students) which we have emphasized throughout: that we will not be telling teachers or parents what anyone has said in an interview. Endo seems to be successfully negotiating or at least managing different cultural values and what is appropriate behaviour in different settings - and he does not necessarily want to explore with us what he is doing. For Mee we unwittingly contributed to his burden. He had made clear in the initial interview that he would very much like to be part of our project; but our mode in the first years of the project of asking students to bring two friends for interview (because we thought this would make students more comfortable talking to us) produced an uncomfortable situation for both Mee and Yanni. For Yanni, the embarrassment was that he had trouble finding anyone who was prepared to come with him. For Mee, in year 8 in particular, it was apparent to us in the interview that the other two students were acting in ways designed to indicate their contempt for Mee.[9]

II Girls' aspirations and identity in an era of change

The last decades of the twentieth century have seen significant changes in the structure of jobs in Australia. There has been significant decline in numbers employed in manufacturing; a strong attempt by governments to reduce the numbers and conditions of those employed in the public sector (traditionally a large employment sector in Australia), a rise in youth unemployment, and in unemployment of older men; a rise in employment in the 'service' sector of the economy; increases in part-time work (in areas such as sales); increasing polarisation of work, where those employed are working longer hours and feeling greater

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[5] There were other geographically feasible public schools which he might have attended.

[6] He told us in the interview at the new school that it was his parents who had 'come across' it and arranged for him to see it, rather than something he had initiated.

[7] I realize I am not discussing here issues related to my selection and interpretations in presenting these 'cases'. The issue is certainly one we are attempting to be self-conscious about, but for reasons of space, I will illustrate those issues in relation to the cases in the next section of the paper.

[8] For example, in year 7 when his belief was that memorizing distances to the planets would help him succeed in science; or in year 10 when he tells us about a project on which he had worked at length, but which was only graded B for containing too much irrelevant material.

[9] This also happened in interviews with at least two other students, one a girl and one a boy. Our response was not to confront this directly but to try to move the interview along, and structure it to try to minimize the interaction between the students.

stress; and many are seeking work or underemployed and impoverished. In terms of gendered patterns, Australia still has one of the most 'sex-segregated' employment patterns, but there has been a notable increase in women entering medicine and law; but much smaller changes in the numbers of men entering what was traditionally seen as 'women's work' (numbers of men entering teaching have declined), of women entering engineering, and of women achieving senior executive positions. As well as laws against discrimination on the basis of gender, the government has funded a number of campaigns both in schools and in the media to persuade girls (and their parents) of the desirability of taking on a wider range of jobs. More recently, social commentators have begun to focus on men's needs as an issue that deserves attention, and have begun to look at boys as the group needing more attention in schools. *(Yates, 1997a, Kenway et al., 1997)*

In the 12 to 18 Project then we were trying to hear and to follow the thinking, agendas, and dreams today of a range of different boys and girls over the years of their secondary schooling. We wanted to look not just at what types of jobs and futures were now being mentioned, and how similar and different these were to the findings of researchers in earlier times. We also wanted to focus on these things as a psychological (and developmental) process in the individuals in our study, as well as a process of their relationship to contemporary culture and to their specific contexts of family and schooling.

In the past, a focus of many researchers interested in gender, has been in the ways adolescence produces different effects for girls and for boys. Across a range of different theoretical orientations, we have been told that while there is a blossoming sexual interest at this time, for boys, achievement and success is part of their attraction; while girls find a need to temper their achievement in order to be attractive. Nielsen and Rudberg summarize as follows:

> *Adolescence is the period that makes sex-equality teachers wring their hands in despair. [...] Girls who in the 6th grade wanted to be veterinarians and lawyers, now aim at being clinic assistants and secretaries, preferably part time in order to combine an occupation with husband and family. In addition the "exciting" female occupations appear on the scene: beautician, hairdresser, tourist guide. [..] This happens almost simultaneously with the boys becoming "realistic" and giving up their dreams of being a pilot or a professional footballer.*
>
> *(Nielsen & Rudberg, 94:33)*

Anyon (1983) and Jan Harding (Harding and Sutoris, 1987)and others have written about how at this stage in so far as girls are thinking about career they are worried about how to balance career and family. In the 1970s and 1980s there was an extended exploration of 'fear of success' as a relevant descriptor of girls' thinking (in Australia, Leder, 1986). Sandra Taylor (1989) wrote about how while boys are expected to be rebelling and testing limits at this age; girls are often expected to show more maturity. And of course Carol Gilligan and others have written about the strains girls experience at this time in being subject to their schools' and cultures' emphasis on public achievement, while being pulled by concerns about relationships with peers and with family. In relation to boys, while Paul Willis' classic work in the 1970s in part was a story about how becoming a man could conflict with being a 'good student'; more recently Bly and others have focussed on the problem of anomie and dislocation for boys today now that women are more assertive, and marriages less stable; and

Lois Weis (1993) has suggested that working class boys may be turning to dreams of very traditional family relationships as a refuge.

In our interviews with the students when they were 13, 14 and 15, we asked them a number of different questions about themselves and the future: whether they thought about this much; whether they thought about what they would be doing when they left school; what they hoped to be doing at 25; what they thought they would be doing at 25; whether they thought their own future would be similar or different to their own mother's and father's; what they daydream about[10]. In most of the interviews the students in our study bring two self-chosen friends. Here is an extract from one of the few interviews which is mixed sex (that is, the girl in our study chose to bring along a boy as well as a girl as her friend - she is one of only two students to do so.) The interview took place in 1994, when the three students were aged 12, and mid-way through their first year of secondary school :

Belinda

Int: Well the last question to the three of you is, do you think about the future much?
Belinda: *I do.*
Steve: *.. when you are at basketball..*
[..]
Belinda: *Well, I'm doing the modelling course because it's posture mainly and I'd like to be an actress. I did want to be a model and that's why I took the modelling course, but after that I thought modelling is too hard work, so I'd like to be an actress. I think it would be fun and you get to travel, so..*
Int: So when you think about the future, you think about what you would like to do? Is that mainly what you do, sort of daydream about what you would like, and that sort of thing?
Belinda: *Yeah. How famous I'd be.*
Sally: *About getting a job.*
Steve: *Sport.*
Sally: *Marriage, having kids.*
Int: What do you think about Steve?
Steve: *Oh, I just think about playing footie or basketball, which one I'll choose. Oh, I don't know... if you are still friends with your friends now.*
Int: What about you Sally?
Sally: *Yep, oh yeah, sometimes I think about getting married and having children. Whether we would have enough money, and getting a job. Getting a job mainly, probably.*
Belinda: *Yeah, it is mainly jobs, because I've never thought about marriage.*
Steve: *There's lots of jobs.*
Sally: *.. don't say hairdresser, cos that sounds cheaper...*
Steve: *I'd be a professional sportscaster.*

[10] Not all in the same interview - we usually asked only one or two questions about this in each.

Belinda: *Yeah, oh well I only think about having kids and marrying when somebody brings the subject up. I won't have kids until I've travelled, that's a definite decision.*
Steve: *I don't care about travelling.*
Sally: *Neither do I. [...]*

(BHSB.94a, pp.16-17)

What do we make of all this? Are we finding here traditional orientations of boys to dream about sport and girls towards romance, glamour and fantasy on the one hand and pragmatic realism about a future combining work and family on the other? What are we to make of the difference in comments of Belinda and Sally? How much of what the three are saying is being produced as a message to each other (Belinda flirtatiously challenging Steve) or to us (Belinda letting us see her as a glamorous person; Sally conscious that we might be assessing whether they are saying the right things about future jobs, and that hairdresser is not an approved-of aspiration)? Is Steve's statement that he thinks about whether he'll still have the same friends an indication that relationship is important to him, and is important in his life now; or is it mainly an indication that his thinking is locked into his present world and only thinks about the future by reference to this? Has Steve's comment that his thinking about the future occurs when he is at basketball implications for research methodologies that are trying to question students in school-based interview situations?

I am trying to draw attention to two issues here. One is that there is no simple or assured way of testing an interpretation, but that we do need to be trying to test (or, if that term sounds dated, 'reflexively critique') our claims. One way of taking this further is by considering what these students say in later interviews; and also what the other males and females in our study say to the same questions. We will also be asking the students themselves to comment on what they said earlier in the final year of the study, when we will show them the earlier tapes; we did not want to do this before that point. But these comments too are additional evidence, rather than an authoritative truth of what was going on (*Maclure, 1993*).

The second is the problem of presenting the evidence or warrant for interpretation in a study like this. The reader is given a different basis for engaging with claims if we take a sizable chunk of interview and explore at some length the context in which things are said; the characteristics and history of those participating and so on than they are if, as shortly, I extract (and abstract) phrases from a range of interviews which illustrate a claim.

The interview quoted above took place in the middle of the first year of secondary school of these students. In an interview at the end of the same year, Belinda again brought Steve, but this time brought Trevor rather than Sally as her other friend. Again, Belinda talks about wanting to travel, but this time about wanting to go to university, and wanting to go to Africa and study animals and being a zoologist. Steve says he'd like to play professional football or basketball after he leaves school, but will probably end up going to university and 'just do something'. Trevor would like to do something connected with sport, but doesn't know what. This time all three of them do say they think about the future a lot, but don't worry about it. (*BHSB.94b, p.6*). In the first round of interviews the next year, Belinda brings a different boy, and she still talks about wanting to go to Africa (possibly on exchange in year 10), but now mentions as her occupation being a lawyer because it would give her plenty of money and she could travel when she wanted to. (*BHSB.95a, p.5*) The next time she brings two different

girls as the two friends, and we don't really talk about future dreams or aspirations. In 1996 (she is now 14) she brings Sally (from the first interview):

> *Int: Do you daydream, or think about the future much at this stage?*
> *Belinda: Yeah, a lot. [..] I'm starting to. Yeah. Whether I want to get married or not. Whether I want to have kids or not. I definitely want a good job and I want to travel. [..] I've got my mind set on that, and I'll go for that.*
> *Int: ... you haven't made a decision on any of those things yet? you just feel...?*
> *Belinda: Well, yeah. Cos it's really weird. People ask, 'Oh, so what do you want to be when you grow up?'*
> *Sally: And you don't know.*
> *Belinda: I don't know, but I know what area I want to go to.*
> *Sally: I wouldn't have a clue what I want to be.*
> *Belinda: But I wouldn't have a clue, exactly. I don't want to get married until I've actually got a good job and I'm settled down and everything, and I don't want to have kids until I'm married, so..*
> *Int: Right, so there is a kind of sequence? What about you Sally?*
> *Sally: Yeah, take it as it comes, I reckon.*
> *Int: Really?*
> Sally: *I just want to have... my main aim is to get a good job and have my own house...*
> Belinda: *Who with?*
> Sally: *Oh well, yeah, maybe share a house. But I want to have money and I want to have a good job and I want to have a car...*
> Belinda: *and this, and this and this..*
> Sally: *And I want to have lots of fun..*
> Int: What do you think of as a good job?
> Sally: *Something I enjoy.*
> Belinda: *Something that pays well [..] I don't want to work for anyone. I want to be the boss. I want to be the employer.*
>
> (BHSB.96a, p.10)

Later that year, we interview the students alone, and, in one part of the interview ask a series of quick 'word association' questions. Belinda responds to 'future' by saying 'jobs', and to 'you' by saying 'me, sport'. *BHSB.96b, p.2.* She earns money as a basketball referee and enjoys that. In 1997 (Belinda is now 15 and in year 10 of the 12 years of schooling) Belinda brings Sally again:

> Int: do you think about the future much?
> *Belinda: Yeah, I do. Not towards when I'm 25.. but more toward when I'm 18 or 21.*
> Int: And what sort of things do you think about?
> *Belinda: Whether I'm going to go to uni or TAFE ['technical and further education college']; where I'll be, like whether I'll rent a house out or stay with mum. But I want to go towards Melbourne [the large city, about 100k from the provincial town she lives in] to go to uni or TAFE. And then I can't wait till I get my P's. ['P Plates' which would*

allow her to drive a car by herself - available from 18 years of age] And yeah, just to be sort of free I suppose, be able to make my own decisions and do what I want to do.

Int: And in terms of thinking about whether you go to uni or TAFE, what are your current feelings?

Belinda: I think I'd sort of go towards TAFE, cos uni, you sort of have to have a certain percent to get into a different sort of thing.. but TAFE is OK to do because if you've got that behind you as well as your VCE I think you'll be OK.[11]

Int: And have you got any particular sort of courses in mind?

Belinda: *Yeah, hotel management. I'd like to do that. I'd like to go to an international hotel to get it. That's what I'm hoping to do with my work experience, work in a hotel here that's international. So with my Japanese [the language she is studying at school] , that'll help too.*

[...] Int: And Sally, do you think about the future much?

Sally: *Oh, a little bit, yep. Whether I'll change my mind, who my friends are going to be, where I'm going to live, who I'm going to live with. What I'm going to do in my spare time, everything.*

(BHSB.97a, p10)

In the second round of interviews in 1997 (solo interviews), we asked students what were their personal goals for next year (when they are beginning the two years that make up the final school certificate) and for the future. Belinda says that her personal goals for next year all relate to school work and studying, and, for the future:

to be able to manage financially in Melbourne by myself.. and I suppose, maybe get a part time job. Actually I won't have to, because I want to do the course full time, to get it done quicker. And travelling, travelling is a goer for that too.

[and, later in the interview]

Int: And in the future what do you think would make you happy?

Belinda: *If I had a really good life and a job that I could travel in. I love travelling. If I was always travelling it wouldn't bother me. Also if I got to be well off financially, and then be able to see my family, my parents and brothers and um, have a family of my own. That's what I'd like to do. But first my job. I want to travel with my job. I want to be able to do those things.*

(BHSB.97b, p.3)

In terms of the types of social categories data-bases use, Belinda is very much a middle, 'average' type of young woman: her parents are small business people; she goes to a large high school which is neither deprived nor highly elite; she lives in a large provincial city. In this report on our conversations with her over four years, we noted the consistency and

[11] Traditionally universities have had higher status than TAFE; the former granting degrees and training for professional occupations; the latter granting diplomas and training for trade occupations. However there has been some attempt by government to increase the advertising and popularity of TAFE; and some occupations which have current popularity, such as in hospitality and design, are offered there, and it is no longer the case that students who get the highest range of marks in school all go to university rather than TAFE, although this distinction in terms of entry marks would still be the broad pattern.

strength of her desire for glamour and travel, maintained both in the earlier 'stage' where she mentioned a range of particular jobs and fantasies (model, actress, vet, lawyer), and also more recently where she is beginning to plan her subject-choices and course after school (hotel management at TAFE). We might note too how she commonly adds to this discussion of dreams for independence a reflection about family and where this might fit in the scheme of things. At the same time, though we ask quite minimal and open questions, and only appear in her life for brief periods at six-month intervals, the interview for Belinda is clearly an event where she makes choices about who she brings, and what self she constructs for them and for us in the interview. She monitors too what we might be making of it: explains changes in aspiration for us, or comments on her friends' wishes:

> [Sally] *I want to have money and I want to have a good job and I want to have a car...*
> Belinda: *and this, and this and this..*

Belinda's dreams then take up images common to many late twentieth century girls in affluent Wtern countries, but they do co-exist with quite a lot of realistic self-assessment, planning and work.

Other girls' dreams: Katie and Sue

Another girl in our study, Katie, attends a wealthy co-educational private school[12]. Her father and grandfather and her brothers also attended or attend the school. In our first interviews of year 7 students at the four schools, Katie is one of the very few girls to mention marriage and children when asked about the future:

> *I think about mine all the time [...] I'm always thinking about like how many kids I want to have and like... I can't wait until I get married and all this, and Mum's going, 'I can't believe that you're thinking about this now, I mean, I didn't think about that 'til I was like 20'. Like, I think about it all the time.*
>
> [WAK.94a, p.11]

In the same interview she tells us, she has already planned her wedding, her honeymoon, and how many kids she will have, how she wants to have kids when she is young. Later she says she also thinks she'd like to

> *travel around the world and just be taking photos all the time, and then I've always wanted to be a busker or something. Be a half time busker. I've always had like an easy going life, I can just imagine it.*
>
> [WAK.94a, p.12]

In the next interview, the pattern is repeated: she first talks about wanting kids, then about wanting to be a fashion designer 'and' a photographer. And travel. The next year, our question 'what do you daydream about?' produces 22 lines of response from Katie. She mentions

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[12] Private school attendance is not such a minority and elite phenomenon as it is in the US, Canada and the UK. In Victoria, the state where this study is done, around one-third of students attend private secondary schools. The school which Katie attends is one of the most wealthy, but its large numbers give it some range of intake (within middle-class as well as very wealthy circles).

kindergarten teacher, planning her kid's names, planning her dream house, being a fashion designer, being a barrister, being a family lawyer. When we ask at the end of that interview *'if you were doing this project, what would you ask?'*, Katie responds:

> *Who wants to have kids. Because I know so many people that don't want to have kids. I'd just love to have kids. I think they're the most beautiful things... my friend said, 'Why go through the pain and all this? All they do is take all your money and all this.' And I just said I would love to have kids. They like, they're meant to be a miracle of life and all this. That sort of, if no one had kids, there won't be a world.*
>
> So you'd like to ask those questions?
>
> Katie: *Yeah, stuff like that, whether they want to have kids and stuff like that. No, I was really thinking about... everyone just wants so many things that they know they'll never get. Well they might get if they really try hard. But, like, we were all talking about our houses, going, oh I'm going to have this big mansion and all these things, and an elevator and all this. Where do you get the money and stuff? You've got to work for it. You just sort of have dreams, but some of them you know probably won't come true.*
>
> [WKir.95a, p.10]

The next year (Katie is now 14) she says she always daydreams a lot, and has about 'four or five lives that I want to be when I'm older'. One is

> *sort of leading the life like I'm in at the moment, like, going to a private school with my children, and stuff like that. Then I think I'd really like it really easy going... you don't really have to have a job, just sort of really easy going...*
>
> [WK.96a, p.3]

In 1997, at 15, Katie has a part-time job in a pharmacist. She says she is looking forward to the future, but about fun things (travel, moving into a house with friends), 'not jobs'. We ask if she has any idea what sort of job she might do, and she says

> *I think that every time I do this I say a different job. But I don't really want to have a job where I have to go to it every day. Like I sort of want to have my own, like do it when I want to do it [...] Like I wouldn't mind doing like natural healing and aroma therapy courses, stuff like that, and just maybe have my own work from home just for a few people and not go into it, you know, five days a week. Just sort of do art, and just not have, I don't know if that means I'm going to have to marry someone rich or anything like that, but just happy sort of, not really doing much..*
>
> [WK.97a, p.8]

In a later (solo) interview that year, Katie has done work experience at places arranged by her family, and has been taken by her mother to a careers counsellor. She now know in detail the courses and options and subjects required for training in naturopathy, and has a detailed and strategic selection of subject choices for next year. She says her goals for the two final years of school are to work hard and have less social life:

> *Because, when you think about it, it is only two years of your whole life, and then you can do basically whatever you want, you know what I mean? And if you go well for these two years, then it sets you pretty straight in life. There's a lot of unemployment around and so I want to go well, so you can get into whatever basically you want.*
>
> [WK.97b, p.2]

Later in the interview she says that her goals after school are to do the naturopathy course, set up her own business and travel; and she says that what would make her happy in the future is meeting a special man, get married, have children early.

Once again, Katie's dreams are not identical with (though they are discussed with) her friends from similar background. Like Belinda she moves from free flowing and rapidly changing ideas of herself in different types of jobs and settings, to a more strategic focussing towards the final years of school. And though in one sense her emphasis is the converse of Belinda: having children is the priority, and travel a desirable backdrop; like Belinda she is conscious and self-conscious about contemporary discussions about the importance of work and new types of work. She is not simply reflecting the 'role models' and 'discourses' she is part of, though she certainly is consciously (as well as unconsciously?) shaping her dreams and ambitions by reference to these.

And here it may be useful to go back to the issues raised by Nielsen and Rudberg:

> *the theoretical problem has been how to inscribe the psychological individual story in a world of cultural meanings, and how to make a theory of psychological gender more sensitive to historical change - without our turning into a cultural analysis that aborts the psychological perspective (p1)*
>
> *how does cultural discourse "turn into" the psychological projects and desires of individual girls and boys? (p2)*
>
> *the great discovery of psychoanalysis is that socialization in fact "works"* through *its contradictions - at the same time as those contradictions make change feasible. (p3)*
>
> *(Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994)*

The dreams we hear in many of the interviews with the girls are neither single and unitary nor, necessarily, contradictory. They are neither simply rational and strategic ambitions, nor simply an absorption of the social messages of the day, but a conjunction of desires and dynamics and processes which, in contemporary circumstances may produce new outcomes.

For example, the dreams of travel and adventure, noted in both Belinda and Katie, were present in many other interviews with girls in the first two years of secondary school.[13]:

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[13] In relation to the methodological comments about ethnographies compared with surveys I made earlier, I should perhaps say that my interpretation of these exchanges as representing an optimism and energy in orientation to the future is made not just on the basis of the quoted words, but also on the basis of voice and body language in these parts of the interviews.

.. it sounds a bit queer, but I'd love to go into space ..
Leanne and I were talking last night, like what we want to do. Like I didn't want to do bungy jumping and Lisa did, and abseiling and things.
I'd like to try skydiving. I'd love to be able to fly some day.
I'd like to be an architect or photographer or something like that. Yeah, and I'd like to do things like the bungy jumping and skydiving..
I'd like to travel..

(BHSL.94a)

I'd love to travel around the world and just be taking photos all the time...
I'd love to be one of those people who just, on the news, they'll like travel and then they'll do a story in this country or something...

(WAK94a, p12)

I'd like to have two big St Bernard dogs. That's what I'd like to have, and I'd like to have a Harley and a convertible, and then drive along with my two St Bernard dogs in the back.
When I'm 25 I want to get a red Porche, drive with my boyfriend to a nightclub and eat custard tarts.
When I'm 25 I want to be travelling around the world... I just want to go everywhere.
When I'm older I'll be a big gambler.
A big card player. I love cards.
I want to bungy jump.
I don't, I want to sky dive.

(WL.94a, p.11)

.. a vet or an airhostess [..] I want to go around the world
Why don't you be a pilot then? Pilot's better than being an air hostess.

(HNA.94b. p.22)

I want to be in a stake out... with guns, and you are crouching down and you are staking out someone..

(HCLV.94a, p.15)

I want to go into the airforce for a while, and then perhaps go commercial or something... and I just think about everything that I want to do when I'm older, like travel and things

(HCLV.96a, p.4)

Such dreams are not simply literal objectives, nor unrelated to images offered on television. Nor are they simply about the future: in many of the same interviews we found expressions of the girls' desire to be free of their own mothers:

Angela: *Sometimes it's nice to just imagine if you've got your own place. It's just, sometimes you just want to get away from your family, like you just hate your family. Like you just, you just get sick of everything and you just want to be by yourself, like, oh, not by yourself, but like just have your own house, and then it's yours and you can do whatever you want. You can, no one telling you what to do, and you just, yeah, you can do whatever you want.*

Kelly: *[...] I've got heaps of things I'd love to be when I'm older, but also, it's sort of, when you get older, you're more independent and that. I hate*

> *it when I go shopping when I go shopping with my mum and I'll see something that I really like and she'll say no, you're not going to get it. But when I'm older I can get whatever I want, sort of thing {...] Yes, I think it would be really fun to sort of having your own life, and like a good job.*
>
> *(12 year old girls at private school, WAK.94b, p.16)*

> *Int: Can you imagine what it will be like when say you're about 25? What do you think you'll each be doing, or your life will be like when you're 25?*
>
> *Anne: Well, I'll have... I'll probably be in a house with cats everywhere and I'll be sick with a cold or something. And the dogs. With cat food everywhere and my mum coming over worrying about me - out on some deserted island or something. So she can't come.*
>
> *(middle class girls at metropolitan state school, HNA.94a, p.12)*

In other words, at an age when these girls are wanting to rebel against their mothers, the discourse of gender reform, of the need for girls to broaden their horizons, gives an energy and optimism to their orientation to the future. Their closeness to and awareness of their mother are not simply a source of psychological strain for them; the tensions are able to be channelled quite productively in many cases.[14]

That is one way of considering the processes of thinking and the types of aspirations revealed in these interviews: looking at the different types of things that are said by an individual, or a group of girls, looking at the themes they return to, or the conjunctions they make. Another is to note differences between the stories we hear. The cases I've set out to date, the girls' energy when talking about their dreams of the future, the non-literal images of future possibilities, were striking to us when we did these interviews - in other words in relation to our starting interest in 'what does gendered subjectivity look like *today*?' and by comparison with the same girls' talk and body language in other aspects of the interviews; in comparison with what boys at their schools were saying in relation to the same open set of questions. But these orientations did not represent all girls.

Sue

Another girls in our study is Sue. In the first years of secondary school, Sue was living in a country town and helping her mother cook for the caravan park which they managed. In different interviews, related to the current topic, she talked about expecting her life to be similar to the present, though she hoped to train as a chef and cook in a different context; stayed silent and let her friends talk; discussed a fantasy house and winning the lottery, but added 'it's just imaginary [...] very, very imaginary'; talked of wanting to do childcare because she is good with children. In contrast to Belinda and Katie, she never indicated that the future

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[14] These themes are particularly intense with the middle-class girls, precisely because of the emphasis on individuality and achievement in middle-class life (noted by theorists as diverse as Gilligan in *Making Connections*; Connell et al in *Making the Difference* (private schools and 'renovated femininity'; Bernstein etc; Chodorow etc). The family (and their school) is nurturing individuation (which incorporates some rebellion against regulation) but also is making sure they do recognize what is needed for success (attention to schoolwork; appropriate career aspiration).

held great possibilities[15], and, in terms of process over time, whereas they moved from fantasy dreams in year 7 to more realistic planning in year 10, Sue in year 7 envisages a realistic occupation, and by year 10 is not so certain about where she is going, and dreams of winning the lottery. One of her friends, in response to the question about whether parents and teachers ask about what they will do in the future, says this:

> *What I'm going to do, I'm going to go through Year 10, to Year 10, and then and then do Year 12. If I fail that, I'm just going to quit altogether. I might have another go. I don't know. This is what I'm going to do. And then I'm going to go through to College.*
> Int: What sort of college?
> *I don't know.*
>
> *(BSCS.95a, p.10)*

There is not space here to talk in detail about other differences and comparisons (but *McLeod & Yates, forthcoming* takes up some further related issues), and about other themes in the young people's comments on their futures[16]. However I want to return briefly to one of the methodological queries I raised at the beginning: the objection of some reviewers to including what they see as pseudo-quantitative representations of our findings. Here I will simply list four brief 'snap-shots' of 'findings' which, I would argue, neither speak for themselves, but are useful in building up the mosaic and interpretative representations of the issues I've been discussing above:

- in solo interviews when the students were at the end of year 9, aged 14 to 15, we asked them for brief 'word association' responses to a list of words. Here is how they responded to the word 'future':

  Boys: *don't know; important; no idea; I don't really know; future career; present; I have no idea; I haven't really thought about it; ah, open; want to be a surgeon; I don't know; basketball player; money.*

  Girls: *older; jobs; job; exciting; born; big future; what I want to be; past; child care; [no answer]; a bet; none; working.*

- In 1997, we found that only three of the girls in our study did not have a part time job - and one of those had just quit a job, and one had gained a job by the second round interviews. Only four of the boys in our study did have a job. There was no such difference evident if the answers were grouped not by gender but according to school, or to class background.

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[15] Our first interview with Sue was in grade 6 of primary school, and she was very talkative and 'bubbly'. Several years later she told us that she had been instructed by her mother in relation to that first interview to smile a lot and answer our questions positively.

[16] Some of the issues I would want to take up here that the girls seem much more reflexive about their own biographical development; evidence relating to changes in middle-class jobs and that more of the children from professional backgrounds are talking about wanting not to work full-time; the extent to which working-class boys bring up the issue of future family situation..

- To a direct question (in 1997, students are 15) about whether they felt optimistic or pessimistic about the future, the majority of the girls said optimistic, and the majority of the boys said mixed.

- At three of the schools, the answers to the optimism/pessimism question contained a similar and mixed range of answers; at the fourth school, both girls and boys were more likely to use a phrase such as 'I just take it as it comes'. (Sue attends this school; the quotes from the girls about adventure and flying include girls from each of the other three schools.)

In conclusion....

The form of this project is one where we move between a detailed engagement with each student's story, and attempts to think about similarity and difference. It is a cliché that we should be seeking to understand, say, how different types of students 'do' or are formed by particular interactions of, say, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. But I think it is also relevant to consider that at particular points, some aspects of these formations may be more salient than others. In the stories told above I have been trying to say something about the way cultural change, educational reform, and gendered psychology may be producing certain orientations to the future in early adolescent middle-class girls But the comparisons made available in our study offer other perspectives on the experiences of different groups. Finally, in relation to the discussion of policy-makers, reform projects and pathways, it is important to note that this is work in progress. It is only in the remaining years of our study that we will see what courses/jobs/other directions the students do in fact take up, and this will be an important retrospective point from which to re-assess the evidence of earlier interviews.

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